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**THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE**

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

**National Intelligence Officers**

SP - 16/79  
2 February 1979

**MEMORANDUM**

**SUBJECT: Response to Question from Senate Armed Services Committee  
during DCI's 23 January Briefing (C)**

**Question: What is the importance of the cruise missile to US strategic  
capabilities?**

1. Because the Intelligence Community's primary role and expertise in assessing strategic capabilities are focussed on the Soviet side of the equation, we can best respond to this question from the Soviet perspective: What is the likely Soviet perception of the US cruise missile threat? (C)
2. The Soviet's immediate concern undoubtedly is that the US deployment during the next decade of a large number of small highly accurate long-range cruise missiles will stress the USSR's air defense capabilities. The small radar cross section and low altitude cruise capabilities of these missiles will make Soviet radar detection, tracking and interception of them difficult. A large number of such missiles could saturate key elements of the USSR's air defense system. Moreover, long-range cruise missiles, when used in a combined US air attack on the USSR, would enhance substantially the survivability of penetrating bombers by further complicating the Soviet air defense problem. (S/NF)

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3. US long-range cruise missiles are being designed with an accuracy and yield combination that will give them a significant hard-target kill potential. Although the relatively long flight-time associated with such missiles precludes their being used as a quick response retaliatory weapon, the Soviets probably view them as a potential threat to any of their intercontinental forces, including ICBMs, withheld from an initial Soviet strike. (S/NF)

4. In examining the impact of long-range cruise missiles on the strategic balance, the Soviets can foresee that the deployment of such missiles beginning in the mid-1980s would significantly increase the number of US strategic nuclear weapons. Our present judgment is that the Soviets will match or somewhat surpass the US in on-line strategic weapons in the early 1980s for at least a few years. The projected large-scale US deployment of cruise missiles is the only presently-programmed US force development that the Soviets could expect to cause them to fall behind again in on-line strategic weapons during the mid-1980s and after. (S/NF)

5. A large-scale US deployment of cruise missiles would have other possible implications for the Soviets. It would:

--Add incentives to improving their air defense capabilities against low altitude attack; the Soviets would realize that an increasingly large portion of US intercontinental offensive force will reside in low-altitude aerodynamic vehicles.

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--Heighten Soviet concern about possible improvements to NATO forces through direct transfer of cruise missiles, transfer of relevant technologies, or independent cruise missile development by NATO countries.

--Contribute to Soviet incentives to develop and deploy long-range air-launched cruise missiles themselves, even though we think current Soviet technology cannot match the combination of small size plus long range and hard target kill capability in current types of US cruise missiles. (S/NF)

6. For evidence of Soviet perceptions derived from their statements and writings, please see the attached article published by the CIA/NFAC last year. Since the publication of this article, the Soviets have also alluded to the difficulties posed by cruise missiles to current air defense forces. (U)

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SOURCE: OSR Publication, "Strategic Monthly Review," May 1978

### Soviet Views of the Cruise Missile Threat

Soviet statements and writings of the past two years reflect concern that potential US deployment of long-range cruise missiles (LRCMs) would destabilize the strategic balance and significantly add to the nuclear threat to the USSR. This fear is aggravated by the prospect that countries on the Soviet periphery could acquire LRCMs or related technology—through either US transfers or independent development. Sensitivity about these missiles will continue to motivate Soviet attempts at SALT to seek numerical limitations, if not bans, on LRCM deployments and to negotiate for a nontransfer provision. These negotiations, however, cannot eliminate Soviet concern that other countries may independently develop LRCMs.

**The US Threat.** The Soviets are adamant that US long-range cruise missiles will increase the strategic threat to their country. They point out that submarines and ships, land-based platforms (whether in Europe or the continental United States), and aircraft can launch cruise missiles while they are thousands of kilometers away from their targets and that from appropriate launch locations any of these systems could impact within the Soviet homeland. In *Red Star* (21 April 1977) one military writer noted that:

...modern cruise missiles are intended to tackle strategic tasks. When deployed on submarines, ships or bombers or on the territory of the United States' allies, they are perfectly capable of hitting targets on the USSR's territory.

The Soviets portray this threat in both qualitative and quantitative terms. They say that the US LRCMs—when deployed—will be nuclear capable (they seldom mention conventional ordnance), more accurate than MIRVs, and "extremely difficult" to detect because of their "small reflective surface and low-altitude flight."

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In addition, Soviet commentary often asserts that the United States is likely to deploy LRCMs in large numbers, typically suggesting several thousand in the 1980s.

While projecting such large-scale deployments, Moscow describes cruise missiles as an addition to existing US intercontinental delivery systems. In the Soviet view, US planners envisage the LRCMs as a "fourth component" of the US strategic arsenal, with a role "supplementary" to that of US ICBMs, SLBMs, and strategic bombers. Only a few articles have gone into further detail by suggesting potential targets for the LRCMs. The targets they mention—industrial, political, and administrative centers, hardened silos, and troop concentrations—closely match those that Soviet writers have mentioned for other US strategic weapons.

Such writings convey the impression that the Soviets do not perceive any military requirements that LRCMs are uniquely suited to fulfill or any that LRCMs can fulfill better than other delivery systems. One Soviet commentator argued in April 1977 that "the potential of the cruise missile has emerged more quickly than the definition of its military purpose" and that LRCMs are an example "of a new weapon system for which there is no military or other need."

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**The Proliferation Threat.** The Soviet concern about the potential expansion of the US nuclear threat is aggravated by the belief that cruise missiles or their technology could become available to other states. Over the past year Soviet commentary has increasingly warned that some West European states could acquire control of land- and sea-based cruise missiles and that this would be a serious threat of further world proliferation. Many third countries could be interested in this weapon, the Soviets note, because it is relatively cheap and easy to operate.

The Soviets have described three ways in which additional countries might acquire cruise missiles. First, the United States might "hand over" or "sell" them to its NATO allies. Second, the Soviets suggest that the United States might transfer the required technology to some third countries. In December 1977, for example, Soviet media reported a statement by US Defense Secretary Brown that the "United States has not made any commitment not to hand over technology for creating cruise missiles to its European allies."

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Third, the Soviets suggest that some countries could independently develop and produce their own cruise missiles. For example, on 25 September 1977 *Pravda* stated that Britain had "recently allocated money for the development of its own cruise missile." Greater Soviet media attention, however, has been directed toward the possibility of West German development. Citing reports that a German company has acquired rights to use a test range in Zaire's Shaba Province, Soviet commentators have suggested that cruise missiles may be tested there.

In their comments on cruise missiles, the Soviets have not directly mentioned China, but their general expressions of political and military concern about that country suggest that they seriously consider the possibility that it will develop or acquire these systems. They also probably anticipate that China might attempt to acquire either US or West European technology applicable to cruise missiles. To counter any such attempt, the Soviets would be likely to use strong diplomatic pressure on any West European country contemplating such sales.

**Impact on Military Balance.** Soviet discussions maintain that unregulated cruise missile deployment would "destabilize" the US-USSR balance of strategic forces. Large-scale US deployments (several thousand weapons) could, according to one member of the Institute of USA and Canada (IUSAC), "destroy any hope of global strategic stability." Numerous other Soviet commentaries have discussed the same theme but in less explicit fashion. Substantially smaller deployments, however, apparently are not perceived in the same manner. For instance, IUSAC Director G. Arbatov has suggested that although cruise missile deployments would cause uncertainty and unknown consequences, if they were held below 200 missiles they would not alter the strategic balance.

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Soviet commentators are also concerned about the balance of forces in Europe. For instance, a June 1977 Radio Moscow broadcast declared that if the United States deployed or transferred cruise missiles to NATO countries, "the present balance in Europe would be radically upset and to a very dangerous extent." Soviet concern about the European theater is apparently based on both the potential augmentation of US nuclear forces deployed there and the possibility that some additional West European states—especially West Germany—might acquire their own strategic attack systems. The Moscow broadcast noted that "cruise missiles and nuclear warheads together would give the Bundeswehr a strategic offensive weapon, and that is what people are working to obtain."

Although their commentary does not directly reveal it, the Soviets almost certainly are aware that forward-based cruise missiles would diminish their already weak capability to implement their air operation plan in Europe—a principal aim of which is to reduce significantly NATO's nuclear strike capability during conventional combat. Cruise missiles would expand the number of relevant targets and would increase Soviet uncertainty about the success of a conventional strike on nuclear weapons.

**Arms Limitation.** Their perception of the threat, their assessment of the impact of LRCMs on the military balance, and other relevant comments indicate that the Soviets will continue trying to use US-Soviet arms control negotiations to limit LRCM deployments, much as ABM deployments were limited by SALT I. They stress that US LRCM deployments could severely affect the possibility of attaining a new SALT agreement. Soviet writers have insisted that activities which would circumvent a new accord must be avoided and have emphasized that a new SALT agreement must foreclose US transfer of cruise missiles or related technology to third countries. On 14 April 1977 an editorial in *Pravda* emphasized both themes and urged that such loopholes must be avoided if a new accord is to be reached. Mentioning "the question of not handing strategic weapons to third countries and of not taking any actions to circumvent the agreement," it added that "there is a need to stress that the Soviet side does not conceive of an agreement without these provisions." Ten months later, on 11 February 1978, another *Pravda* editorial repeated that the US and USSR must be sure the agreement "completely excludes the possibility of strategic arms being handed over to third countries, or of [its] being circumvented...."

The Soviets do not expect that a new SALT agreement can prevent other countries from developing LRCMs independently. They occasionally hint, however, that as a byproduct of US agreement to limit deployments of LRCMs, third-country interest in these missiles could decline. (Secret NOFORN).

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